

Festival of Cancer, London, June 2018

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Welcome to our Full Moon meeting in the sign of Cancer. The seed thought we will use tonight is “I build a lighted house and therein dwell”. From the esoteric perspective, Cancer is the sign in which incarnation is fully achieved, completing a journey which begins in Aries. The descent of the incarnating Soul through the mental, emotional and etheric planes concludes when it takes possession of a dense physical vehicle. This is to be its home for many, many cycles around the zodiac. “Home” is a deeply evocative word: one wonders whether the “om” concealed within it can possibly be there by accident. For Humanity, our current home is the planet Earth, although there are some who believe that we must make every effort to extend our concept of home to other planets soon, before we outstrip the material resources of the Earth. But wouldn't it make more sense to learn to restrain our appetites, to be able to say “enough”? The question of whether we can shape a global civilisation that can accept self-imposed limits is becoming more urgent by the year. And there is the more subtle psychological point of whether the human species can learn to reconcile its many diverse cultures. Can we, in nations across the world, create spaces of true welcome and belonging for everyone? This question is at the root of utopian thinking, and we will be pondering what some utopias might look like tonight.

While the term “utopia” was invented by Sir Thomas More, as the title for a book, the idea of a place or time where humanity lives in harmony is ancient. The Greeks and the Hindus both have their myths of a golden age, a time long in the past which is also destined to cyclically re-appear. Helena Blavatsky discusses the cycle of the Ages from the Hindu perspective. In one article, she refers to seven possible Ages, in line with the seven planes and globes. She suggests that we are currently in the Iron Age, the Age furthest away from the Golden Age in psychological terms. It may be this sense of an almost unbridgeable gulf between the Golden Age and our current predicament, both in time and in psychological conditions, which gives utopian writing its edge of deep longing for return and restoration. Like Adam and Eve, we feel as if exiled from an Edenic state of harmony among ourselves, and with the other kingdoms of nature. Another variant of this vision is the myth of Arcadia. The term is derived from the Greek province of the same name which dates to antiquity; the province's mountainous topography and sparse population of pastoralists later caused the word Arcadia to develop into a poetic byword for an idyllic vision of unspoiled wilderness. Arcadia is a poetic shaped space associated with bountiful natural splendor and harmony. The 'Garden' is often inhabited by shepherds. The concept also figures in Renaissance mythology.

The inhabitants of Arcadia were often regarded as having continued to live after the manner of the Golden Age, without the pride and avarice that corrupted other regions. During the Golden Age peace and harmony prevailed, and people did not have to work to feed themselves, for the earth provided food in abundance. They lived to a very old age with a youthful appearance, eventually dying peacefully, with spirits living on as "guardians".

And here is a description of the Satya yuga, the First and Perfect Age, as described in the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata:

“Men neither bought nor sold; there were no poor and no rich; there was no need to labour, because all that men required was obtained by the power of will; the chief virtue was the abandonment of all worldly desires. The Krita Yuga was without disease; there was no lessening with the years; there was no hatred or vanity, or evil thought whatsoever; no sorrow, no fear. All mankind could attain to supreme blessedness.”

From the esoteric perspective, these visions may sound like a description of souls prior to incarnation. Mingled in with this may also be a deep racial recollection of actual phases of civilisation where the guidance of the Hierarchy was available to humanity through direct, living presence. And the harmony with the lower kingdoms may also reflect the deep sympathy with the lower kingdoms which no doubt existed when humanity was itself only just emerging from the animal kingdom. The challenge of utopian thinking is to imagine ways in which these deep connections with the higher and lower kingdoms can be re-established, only this time with humanity in full conscious control of the process. This is indeed a profound challenge, for we know that, on every level of the three worlds of human incarnation, there are significant obstacles. On the physical-etheric plane, the operation of the forces of Maya create the obstacle of materialism. On the emotional plane, the plane of desires, we face the spectre of selfishness. And on the plane of lower mind, the seemingly impenetrable barriers of separateness block our path. How are we to find our way around, or over, or even through these opposing fields of accumulated force? And beyond them, how are we to make the great leap of will imbued with faith, which enables us to cross the abstract mind into the spiritual palaces that exist in the higher ethers of the system? In the examination of some contemporary utopias, we may find some clues.

Before we do so, let's pause for a few moments and then say together the Affirmation of Love which appears in the lower interlude, stage 6 of the meditation.

In the centre of all Love I stand. From that centre I, the soul, will outward move. From that centre I, the one who serves, will work. May the love of the divine Self be shed abroad, in my heart, through my group, and throughout the world.

OM

In the writings of Ursula K. Le Guin, who passed on in February this year, there are strong and complex threads of utopian thought, which qualify many of her fictions, but are also given more explicit form in at least four of her works. Of these works, only one, *The Dispossessed*, is explicitly sub-titled as a utopia, and even then, it is called an “ambiguous utopia”. By using “ambiguous”, Le Guin is acknowledging just how difficult it is for human nature to fully embrace and implement ideas that may transform communities into spaces where right relationships hold sway. Indeed, the society of Anarres described in *The Dispossessed* is perhaps the furthest away of Le Guin’s utopias from this ideal. This explicitly anarchist society is one where there is equality of access to resources for all citizens, but set in a place where in fact there is a shortage of natural resources. This lack of abundance makes it essential that everyone cooperates and sacrifices individual desires for the good of the whole; but the question remains open whether this level of intense cooperation would continue if the resources were more plentiful. And while an anarchist society is one in which there are supposedly no hierarchies of authority and control, it becomes evident in the course of the story that the unredeemed nature of human personality means that these hierarchies have not gone, they have simply taken new, less visible forms. So Anarres’ “ambiguous utopia” serves as a useful warning that creating a more enlightened society requires the individual to work in parallel at their own enlightenment.

Before looking at the other utopian works, it is worth considering perhaps the most subtle expression of utopian idealism running through a number of her novels and short stories. This is the idea of the Ekumen, a loose, voluntary affiliation that exists between planetary societies of widely different character. One of the key ideas is that, whenever a new planetary society is encountered, the Ekumen sends out a small team of observers who seek to secretly blend into that society in order to better understand its cultures. After a long and careful period of such observation, one person, the Mobile, is sent to the leaders of that planetary society to announce the existence of the Ekumen, and to invite their planet to join. As you might expect, the arrival of the Mobile may be met with a whole range of responses, from incredulity, to opposition of various kinds, to outright violence. Here is one Mobile speaking to another character in Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*

“I thought it was for your sake that I came alone, so obviously alone, so vulnerable, that I could in myself pose no threat, change no balance: not an invasion, but a mere messenger-boy. But there's more to it than that. Alone, I cannot change your world. But I can be changed by it. Alone, I must listen, as

well as speak. Alone, the relationship I finally make, if I make one, is not impersonal and not only political: it is individual, it is personal, it is both more and less than political. Not We and They; not I and It; but I and Thou. Not political, not pragmatic, but mystical. In a certain sense the Ekumen is not a body politic, but a body mystic. It considers beginnings to be extremely important. Beginnings, and means. Its doctrine is just the reverse of the doctrine that the end justifies the means. It proceeds, therefore, by subtle ways, and slow ones, and queer, risky ones; rather as evolution does, which is in certain senses its model... So I was sent alone, for your sake? Or for my own? I don't know. Yes, it has made things difficult.”

“Yes, it has made things difficult.” Le Guin once again acknowledges the recalcitrance of human nature, and also human culture, human traditions, the difficulty of transforming them in positive directions, even with the best will in the world. And the reference to the subtle, slow, queer and risky mode of operation of the Ekumen, resembling the way in which evolution works, points to the need for transformation to work from the inside out, organically. In a certain sense, a Mobile is an idealised version of an anthropologist encountering a new culture. We could even extend the idea to think of the Mobile as an Avatar, an Avatar of a higher form of relationship, one in which the aim is mutual enrichment and enlightenment. In the Bailey books, it is stressed just how difficult the task will be for the Christ when He re-emerges as the Avatar for the Aquarian Age. He too is coming from a place of higher relationships and energies within consciousness. His task is to seek to help us understand their importance and how they may be implemented within the context of our currently existing institutions. Sometimes, this will mean the destruction or radical transformation of those institutions – we will struggle to recognise them as ‘home’. But the Temple of the Lord, the Lighted House of Cancer, must be built anew for each new era, and the time of Aquarius is upon us.

Le Guin presents another perspective on utopia in one of her latest works, *The Telling*. In this novel, the planetary society of Aka is a recent addition to the Ekumen, and is suffering from what might be seen as growing pains, as it struggles to understand the higher principles of the Ekumen. The long-established culture of most of the planet, which is described in terms reminiscent of Taoism, is currently undergoing violent suppression, as a small minority seek to drive the people onwards to achieve the technological breakthroughs that will allow space flight. An envoy is sent from the Ekumen to try to understand what is happening. One lesson we can draw from *The Telling* is to beware equating the evolution of society with purely materialistic progress. Instead, Le Guin underlines the value of a positive conservatism, one where the cultural practices aim to preserve positive relationships between humans and other kingdoms. This recognition of the value of some aspects of the past is again mirrored in the Christ’s task, for when He returns it is said He will “move to restore the ancient spiritual landmarks” (*Ext.* p.573). However, He will also

“eliminate that which is nonessential” (*ibid.*), and humanity may be surprised and disturbed by what is nonessential.

Le Guin’s most completely realised utopia has a title that resonates strongly with our theme: *Always Coming Home*. It is an unconventional work, which weaves poetry and narrative together with imagined folklore and anthropological field notes. Indeed, the casual reader might easily mistake it at first for non-fiction, an anthropologist’s musings on their encounter with a small Native American group encountered in a Californian valley. This valley, the sense of it as a fully realised and sacred place, is central to the book. Connection to and rootedness in place, a deep sympathy with all the other beings, both physical and non-physical, present in that place, is thus one of the main utopian elements. It presents a rich and subtle meditation on what it means to feel ‘at home’: in a physical place, in a family, in a community, and in the world. One of the themes that was explored at the recent Arcane School conferences was our link to the deva kingdom, and how we may soon begin to re-connect with it in order to better serve the Plan. The growing awareness of ecology (from the Ancient Greek, “oikos” and “logos”, meaning “the study of the house”), the recognition of the importance of indigenous peoples’ knowledge of nature, and the sense that small communities need to be given attention, may all be outer manifestations of this evolution in consciousness.

One of the major issues that humanity currently faces is that the general trend seems to be in favour of the weakening of local and place-based ties towards a more rootless existence. The cities are growing ever larger, at the expense of towns and villages. Millions are on the move, because of conflict or persecution or poverty. And some knowledge workers are becoming ‘digital nomads’, working from anywhere with a Wifi connection, whether a beach in Bali or a Manhattan loft. Companies are beginning to cater to this small sub-section of the global migration trend. For example, there is the company WeWork, which began by creating ‘co-working spaces’ which are basically small, well-appointed office spaces that individuals and small businesses can rent. They then moved into WeLive, accommodation conveniently near their WeWork facilities, which seeks to create a community feel. And they are now planning WeGrow, a school for the children of their WeLive clients. Presumably the idea is that their clients will be able to migrate from one facility to another, surrounded by a bubble of their fellow clients, without worrying too much about what actual country they are in. But will their clients ever truly feel at home? Will the communities they build have any substance? And of course, this company is only catering to a tiny slice of relatively affluent people – their solution isn’t scalable to the vast numbers of refugees and migrants.

It seems there is a need for new, lightweight protocols or rituals of acceptance and integration of incoming people into communities. Each group has to learn to meet the other halfway – with a measure of commitment from the immigrant to respecting

the folkways of the community; and a measure of flexibility from the settled folk. This would suggest a need for a midway space/place/forum where these meetings and negotiations and rituals of welcome can take place. In the past, a significant, and perhaps undervalued part of this work has been done by churches and religious institutions. But as the Piscean era passes out, this is diminishing, so the question is whether other ways can be found to do this. This need to re-establish the identity of communities in a more flexible, open way, to re-negotiate their relationship to the wider whole, is perhaps part of what lies behind some of the more progressive attempts towards national or regional self-determination.

Returning to Le Guin, there is one final curious detail in the utopia of *Always Coming Home*, and also a similar detail in “A Man of the People”, a short story which gives the best description of the Hainish society, which has a history going back over three million years. In *Always Coming Home*, it slowly emerges that the many small communities of human society, collectively called the City of Man, make some use of electricity and other trappings of advanced technology – but computers and robots are effectively a separate society, called the City of Mind. The City of Mind freely shares the knowledge it acquires with humans, and occasionally makes requests for information about their cultural practices. But otherwise, there is no real interaction between the City of Mind and the City of Man. And in the Hainish society, people live for the most part in small, self-regulating communities with strong local traditions, an almost caste-like division of employment and community roles, and carefully contained use of high technology; yet there is also a small sub-section of society, called the historians, who are mainly responsible for the advanced computers and technology that permit contact with other planets. As depicted in “A Man of the People”, deciding to join the historians represents a major and troubling psychological transition, as the protagonist’s sense of identity is challenged. The local traditions that have until now shaped him are revealed as being only one of a bewildering variety of ways of life, not just of the many different communities of Hain formed throughout its long history, but also of other planets.

By creating this distinction between two different modes of life: one intensely place-based and tradition-bound, the other explicitly focused on the widest possible knowledge, Le Guin is provoking reflection on the value and role of the concrete mind in human life. She gives no easy answers, but suggests that the balance will vary from person to person, and that a balance must be found, in the individual and in society. As esotericists, we are familiar with the idea of the lower mind as “the slayer of the real” as far as the individual is concerned – seeing the same idea applied to societies is an interesting extension. Once again, the connection between the individual’s spiritual work on the self, and the spiritualising or redemption of society, is underlined. Illuminating the house of the self, the house of the group, and the house of humanity with the new Aquarian light is the task ahead of us, and our meditation work tonight is a key component of this work.